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Kyros, Peter N., Jr. oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

Interview with Peter N. Kyros, Jr. by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Kyros, Peter N., Jr.

Interviewer
L'Hommedieu, Andrea

Date
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Place
Portland, Maine

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Biographical Note

Peter N. Kyros, Jr. was born on August 21, 1948 in Kittery, Maine to Peter and Alice Kyros. His parents were of Greek ancestry. His father served in the U. S. Navy until 1954, attended law school, and returned to Maine where he began practicing law and politics, and later became a U.S. Congressman. Kyros attended public schools in Portland, Maine, and then Yale University. While at Yale, he worked on several campaigns including his father's, Peter N. Kyros, Sr., and Edmund S. Muskie's. He graduated from Yale in 1970 and University of Virginia Law School in 1975. He worked for Walter Mondale in 1976. He married in 1994. He passed away December 25, 2003.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: 1958 Senate campaign; 1968 vice presidential campaign; 1969 to 1972 presidential campaign period; 1970 Senate campaign; Democratic Party in Maine; driving stories; 1971 trip to Europe; and Muskie relationships with staff.

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Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview, our third session, with Mr. Peter N. Kyros, Jr. at his office, Suite 200 -

Peter Kyros: One Monument Way, Monument Square.

AL: One Monument Way in Portland, Maine on July the 23rd, the year 2001. This is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Well, it's been a while since we last talked.

PK: Yes it has.

AL: But there were some areas I'd like to go back and, that we didn't cover and areas I'd like to, I have some follow up questions too, that we talked about before. And I think we'll begin with the time that you spent driving Senator Muskie in Waterville, Maine in 1970.

PK: Well, I graduated from college in June of 1970. And literally within a day or two, I must have graduated mid to end of May, and within a day or two I drove up to Waterville. And I had been hired to work on the senate reelection campaign, with the understanding that probably I was going to come down to Washington after that, and so I established myself in Waterville. I'm trying to remember where I stayed. I think I got a room in a motel outside of Waterville and I stayed there basically, you know, off and on the whole summer, right to the November election.

And I had a couple of responsibilities; one of them was driving, doing a fair amount of driving and, you know, that was actually kind of a fun experience. Muskie was, it was fun to drive around Maine, you know, in the fall; that was really great. Muskie was odd to drive around because he would either talk or not talk, and you didn't know which it was going to be. There was never any, you know, you could be, you could drive on the Turnpike for three hours and he would sit there silently, you know, crunched into the car because he was always too big to get in any car, or he would just go on and on and on. And it was a wonderful. I got, I enjoyed it because he was never, although he was occasionally in an ill temper about some event or something it was never really directed at me. So I really, really enjoyed it. And I didn't drive him [all the time], there were a couple of other people who shared the driving, you know, but. So I, it wasn't a full time thing.

A lot of the time I was in the headquarters, which was in Waterville, with one, you know, I had a bunch of responsibilities, not particularly well defined. Those were the days before there was the amount of separation that exists legally and procedurally today between, you know, your senate, your congressional office and your campaign office. And so the senate office was just down the street from the campaign office and, you know, they were a little bit more commingled than would be legally or politically appropriate today, or was thereafter, soon thereafter. And so it was a back and forth thing. I mean, Muskie was really running as, you know, he was running as a U.S. senator, he was giving fairly long formal set speeches, you know. Whatever anybody else says, Don was really running the campaign. I can't even remember who the chairman of the campaign was, but we were all taking instructions at relatively regular weekly meetings from Don. Shep Lee was really raising the money.

I had responsibilities for driving Muskie around. For, I used to write letter to the editor responses which was really fun. You know, these sort of the crazy things that appeared in the papers. I did some schedule work and some arrangements work. I did some material, you know, brochure drafting and worked with Eddie Atkins. So this is a long time ago now, preparing the, you know, designing the bumper stickers and stuff.

Billy Alfond was in the office the whole summer. I can't remember if he stayed right through the fall. I think Billy might have still been in college, had one more year of college to go, I can't

remember for sure. But I, Billy also did some driving with Muskie and all kinds of chores and things. Billy used to sometimes go and rush out to wherever we were going to drive Muskie, to give a speech, and put the lawn signs up. So when we'd get off the Turnpike, you know, in Lewiston or something, there'd be some signs there, which Billy would have put up fifteen minutes before. And that always helped.

But actually it was a great summer because there was never any real question that Muskie was going to, you know, be reelected to his senate seat. Do you want me to just keep going on here? Is this useful? I have more, I want to go on through this. So one of the most interesting things of course was the, in 1970, was Muskie being chosen to give the response to Nixon at the, you know, the campaign wrap-up. And, you know, that was my, I had worked a little bit in the '68 campaign. But that was such a, that was an extraordinary event, all-around for all of us, because Muskie, it was the launching point for which in fact we were not particularly prepared for the presidential campaign. And essentially Muskie was picked to make the election eve appeal on behalf of the Democratic Party.

And, you know, it was a long time ago, it was before mini cams and satellite feeds and everything, and so Muskie recorded this speech. And actually I recall, and maybe I may be inventing part of this, I think I took the speech to New York, I think I took the tape to New York on an airplane. And, you know, it was amazing, it was really amazing, the response to that. And that led to, I mean it was very soon after the, I must have been, I must have moved to Washington by December 1st of 1970 and gone to work in the headquarters down there.

So the summer campaign was great, there was never any, you know, there were a few things that came up, the usual gun control stuff and so forth. But, I mean you know, but nothing that, Muskie was just being himself and running for office. And there was a media campaign and, you know, campaign materials and some print advertising. It was a different era than it is nowadays, but he was basically running as U.S. senator and really as a national figure, you know, for the first time as a serious national figure.

And then by the end of that election, given the broadcasts and everything and his 1968 performance, everyone assumed that Muskie, there was a working assumption among the sort of political elites in the Democratic Party, that Muskie was going to be the candidate which was, in 1972, which was ultimately his downfall. It was that automatic, it was, that's what set in process, in my view, the downfall. It was everybody assumed it was going to happen and didn't, the deep homework that needed to be done didn't get done.

AL: During that summer, when you were driving and doing all these other things for Senator Muskie in Maine, did we yet have the Maine senate offices? Were those already in place or did, were they developed after that campaign?

PK: What do you mean by the Maine senate office?

AL: The Waterville office and -

PK: Yes, for Muskie's office in the state of Maine?

AL: Yes.

PK: Yes, very much so. Yeah, we were really operating, we had a headquarters in Waterville, a set of offices. And down the street, down Main Street, you know, was the senate office and we were, that was my point about they were really commingled. And Muskie had the little overnight suite and everything, you know, that place where he slept. And, you know, Marge was there, and I'm trying to remember who else was there. I'm having a hard time this morning recalling who was staffing the senate office. But you know, you never, it's Waterville, you never, in the old days you never left Main Street. I can remember my motel was at one end of Main Street, and the senate office was on Main Street and the campaign office was on Main Street, Eddie Atkins' office, you know, printing plant was, you know, a quarter of a mile away. So it was all right there and it was all commingled. Muskie would arrive and stay in the senate office, if he was there for a day or so. And I recall that we, the campaign's staff meetings, you know, Don came up for a day or two, they were in the senate office in that little conference room. So yes, we did have the senate office then.

AL: You had them all over Maine, in Bangor and Portland?

PK: He had a, before the, he had a Portland office, there was a little Portland office I think, I can't remember that for sure. There certainly obviously was a, Waterville was the main office. There was a Bangor office. I'm trying to think if there was an office in Aroostook. I remember driving, or meeting him in Aroostook. I think Harry Winger [pilot] brought him somewhere and I met him in Aroostook once, and we drove south. I can't remember the offices, that's too far away.

AL: What I was trying to come toward is the id-, there was talk at some point that, was Muskie the "man from Maine" still? That there was a lack of connection with Senator Muskie and Maine, or it was perceived that way.

PK: Well that was all they had. The only thing you could possibly say about Muskie in 1970 to try to attack him at all was, he was too big for his britches. And it was, I mean Muskie had become a national figure, end of story. There wasn't any doubt about that. He was viewed as one of the top two or three leaders in the Democratic Party; he had run for vice president. His run for vice president had resonated with not just the Democratic Party but with voters all over the country. He had had an extraordinary vice presidential campaign. And sure it's, you know, that's always part of Maine, you know, are you still the local guy, are you still the guy from, you know, Rumford. But I don't think you'd ever, I think everybody was very conscious of that and so there was a fairly low key atmosphere to the campaign. And I don't think it, I don't think it ever resonated; I don't think it ever grabbed hold very much. I can't remember what he won by, but it was very substantial. No, I don't think that was, that was clearly what was being drawn against him and it didn't work, it clearly didn't work.

People were proud of him. There was never, you know, he had become a little bit, he always was a large figure as it were, not just physically. But by that time he had really become a national figure, there were occasionally, it's not like it is today in campaigns, but occasionally a

national reporter would be up in Maine to follow him for a day or watch him for a day. And people clearly, nationally, had their eye on him. Although the speech, the pre-election speech boosted all that geometrically.

AL: When you were, you spent quite a bit of time with Senator Muskie that summer.

PK: I did.

AL: In the car and going all over Maine. Did you, did he ever, you said sometimes he wouldn't say anything and sometimes he would talk. Would he ask you input, or would he, you know, sort of try to work out strategy on something, or?

PK: No. The answer to that question is no. We always had a very personal relationship and, but not that kind of a relationship. And also he was, you know, I was just out of college, I was young. And I had known him a long time because he knew my dad and my family and, very, very well. I'd known him since I was a, really, truly a child. Not that I wasn't a child when I, the day I graduated from college. But the answer to that is no. He was, we were, he was comfortable with me. And I always felt that he was comfortable with me not talking, you know, not filling the sounds, filling the vacuum, and that that was a positive thing. So we had conversations but I would, I would never say that we sat in the car driving on the Maine Turnpike talking about what it was going to be like when he ran for president. The answer to that is no, didn't happen.

It was a much more, you know, what's the next stop going to be, who's there, how did this happen, how did this get screwed up, how did this, boy that was good, you know. More of this, what about this, I have to go back for a vote. It was operational and it was really surprisingly lax. You know, he always was better in Maine. His, he was a moody man and, as everybody I'm sure has reported a million times in these interviews, but he was always better in Maine. There was always a night and day quality when he was back in Maine, always.

AL: And you mentioned Marge Hutchinson earlier.

PK: I did.

AL: What -?

PK: Well, you know, she was just such a great person. She just was the queen bee of the whole thing. And he loved her, she could do no wrong, and she kind of, you know, presided over. The Maine operation was not a heavy duty substantive operation. It was the scheduling, the Maine senate operation, and it was a scheduling and casework operation and, you know, provided support for him when he was here. And he loved, he loved hanging around Waterville. Always did.

AL: And also you -

PK: And Marge waited on him hand and foot.

AL: Right. Did you also know Gayle Cory?

PK: Very, very well.

AL: It seems to me that he had these two very supportive, wonderful women in Maine and Washington.

PK: Oh yeah, very much so.

AL: How do you think, I mean that must have really been, I don't know, a great help to him in his career.

PK: Well, I think it was more emotional. And I mean, they were obviously very good at their jobs, but they just . . . . You know, I considered Gayle a friend, a true friend. I mean I knew, Marge was a little older and although I knew her well, I never worked with her as intimately as I worked with Gayle. Because then, ultimately, I was working in Washington and Gayle was in Washington. And I, of course, knew Gayle's brother and everything. They, Gayle particularly, knew the history of everything from the day one, and I think he felt comfortable; he had complete trust in them. There was no, if there was something wrong with the family or something, or something intimate that had to be taken care of, I don't think he had any concern about their, and I think he felt that way about most of the people from Maine who stuck with him. He was never nervous or suspicious that somebody had some other agenda, or that somebody wasn't trustworthy or discreet.

And I always felt that was an important part of my relationship with him, that he knew me well, since I was very young, and I never tried to become his principal strategic adviser. That was not my role. I didn't want to do that. I wanted to be someone that he, because I was with him so much in, particularly in '70 and '71 and earlier. You know, you can't have a relationship with somebody who's running for an office like that, with that kind of stress, and always go in and have them roll their eyes and say, you know, "Oh God, here comes Peter again with some new problem." It's not, that's not the way that you, the job is to be steady and discreet and get the job done and have the . . . . I always wanted Muskie to feel that I was, you know, not going to drive him crazy.

There were people who could drive him crazy, you know, he didn't, he'd, people would, you know, come in and say, "I want to talk to you right now about this schedule for the next six years." And, you know, that may not be what he wanted to do right now. And if you spend a lot of time with someone, it's a fairly intimate relationship and you can't, you can't be in the position of always bringing bad news, or of always wanting to, having him feel, 'Oh no, I'm going to be exhausted now when this kid comes in with whatever his problem is'.

AL: You mentioned Ed Atkins earlier.

PK: Yes.

AL: And he, he was the husband of Barbara Atkins -

PK: It was indeed.

AL: - who was [is] the sister of George Mitchell?

PK: Absolutely right.

AL: But I don't know much about him. Can you tell me -?

PK: Well, of course, he was a printer and he had a wonderful printing business. And he was a wonderful, wonderful man, and he was a great guy. And I got to know Eddie very well also, because in my father's campaigns he did, he printed all of, he was the Democratic printer. He had a union bug in a union shop, and was also someone who had known Muskie many, many years and in a way was part of the extended family. And [he] was another one of those people that Muskie could be around who would never give him substantive advice, who would just say, you know, "You're so great." Which is important. Eddie, you know, he was just a great person. He was a relaxed great, great person and it was fun doing the brochures and all that.

Print media was more important then than it is now. So, you know, doing a brochure, the draft of it and the photographs and all that which you were going to run, you know, maybe fifty or a hundred thousand copies of and distribute around, so it was a very important thing. Bumper stickers were important. People don't, you know, it's not the same as it was then. But those types of media, you know, the design of a sign on the side of a bus or the occasional billboard which we'd do the design with them, with Eddie Atkins, he had design people, was all much more important than it is now, when everything is focused on the electronic media. So, yeah, there was a, I spent a lot of time with Eddie Atkins who was a great person. I'm trying to remember when, Eddie died four or five, five years ago, not six years ago.

AL: Oh, that recently?

PK: I think so, maybe earlier. I can't remember. I can't remember.

AL: Do you know if there were people, I know there was a political set of people that Senator Muskie dealt with on a daily basis during the campaign, but in the Waterville area was there a social set of people, were there any people in particular that he just went and relaxed with?

PK: I can't answer that. I used to come back to Portland on weekends if we weren't working, you know, my grandmother was here. I really can't answer that. I don't know. I think, that summer, they still had the house at China Lake. I don't think they, they didn't have the Kennebunkport house yet, I don't think. And I think Jane and the kids were at China Lake. That seems to ring true to me. I'm trying to remember when he got the house in Kennebunkport, but I don't think it was then. I think he was still at China Lake. And so I think he used to go there, you know, when he had a day or two off in Maine.

But, you know, it was very odd because the Waterville senate office had a sleeping apartment in

it. Did you know that? Has anybody discussed that? It had a sleeping apartment. He could spend, he spent the night there often, in the office, in a little bedroom suite, with a shower and a bathroom and everything. You know, it was like totally a, so he, you know he, it wasn't like he was going off and spending the evening with the Atkinses or, you know, one of George's brothers or something. No, the answer to that is no, I would not.

He was already scheduled during that senate campaign, as a result of our education, all of us in the '68 presidential campaign, vice presidential campaign, he was already being scheduled as though he were a national figure. So that his schedule, instead of saying, you know, lunch at the Rotary, you know, stop by bingo hall in the evening, said, you know, 9:00 AM breakfast, 10:00 AM staff briefing with Peter, 11:00 AM call to Washington, 11:30 depart Waterville office, 12 noon arrive Lewiston Rotary, 1:00 PM depart, it was very detailed which was not the way, you know. If my dad, when my dad was running for congress in that year, his schedule could fit on a 3X5 card, it just wasn't done to that level of detail, or that standard. So he was already being treated that way.

AL: Did you get a sense of how he felt about his time being so scheduled?

PK: I think it was the worst, I think it was the worst part of it for him, on a really life time basis. I think he saw it as a necessary evil and he did it all. But I think he, you know, from that time he was already starting to complain that he was over scheduled. He was a person who needed a certain amount of time to just internally process. And I don't think, for whatever reason, and not the least of it was his problem, not just his staff's problem, our problem. I don't think a system that dealt with that personal quality trait was ever adequately worked out. From that time, to the end of the time certainly that I knew him well, and I'm sure this was true to the end of his business life, professional, political life, he was complaining about white space and not having enough time to sit and think. So I think from the beginning it was a problem.

Hence, you know, sitting in the car for three hours, silently, you know. And Charlie Lander was still doing a lot of driving then, and Charlie Lander was perfectly capable of sitting in the car with him and driving from Portland to Fort Kent and never saying a word. They were perfectly capable of doing that, being in a car together for six hours, stopping for lunch, filling up the car with gas, and never saying a word to each other; perfectly companionably. Like, you know, an ancient husband and wife. But, you know.

AL: You mentioned the name Harry Winger?

PK: Harry Winger was a pilot who had an airplane company who used to fly us around, private, small planes, terrifying small planes.

AL: Was he involved politically at all, or he just did the flying?

PK: The flying.

AL: And Billy Alfond, is that a son of Harold Alfond?

PK: Yes it is, yes it is. He was, I just can't remember whether Billy, Billy was around that whole campaign but I think he went back to college. Now, I'm trying to remember where Billy, I think, I can't remember if he went to Colby or Bates. Billy was around that whole fall, that summer and off and on in the fall, and did stuff, helped, enjoyed it. Billy's a great guy, he's a great guy. I haven't seen him in a long time.

AL: Let's skip over and talk about your trip with Senator Muskie in 1971, when you went to London, Israel, Egypt, Moscow and Bonn.

PK: Sure. Well, I went ahead, you know, I do remember when I left, I left the day after Christmas in 1971. And this was a grand trip, you know, to give Muskie visibility and education, but more visibility because he was already very well educated about foreign affairs. And, you know, it was a kind of grand political tour. And I left the day after Christmas from Dulles with Bob Nelson who was a, working on the Muskie campaign with a number of, two or three guys, Berl Bernhard. And we, I think we flew, I'm just trying to remember how this worked. I think we went to Moscow first to do advance. I don't think I went to London. This was all very confusing in retrospect because this trip, which took place right after the New Year, was affected gravely by a terrible European snow storm. Have you conducted any interviews about this?

AL: No.

PK: I can't remember every detail and I'll have to . . . . Don Nicoll will remember part of it I'm sure because he was on it. He was with Muskie. I went ahead to Moscow with Bob Nelson, and we set up the Moscow part of the trip. Bob was the chief advance person, I was there to help. I was, you know, still, I was twenty, I was twenty-two years old. And then I went on to Bonn, or Munich, and Tony Lake met me there, and Tony Lake was working on trip arrangements. And then Muskie flew to London with his traveling party, with Jane and Don Nicoll, and I think Hilda was on this trip, I know Hilda was on this trip.

And then through, I can't remember the exact thing, but there was some weather disaster and they could not get out of London to, I think to Germany, couldn't do Germany. So they went to London and then they went to Moscow, we met in Moscow. And, you know, he, it was a grand, it was as though he was already, it's hard to explain. He was treated by the foreign governments as though he were going to be president. When we were in Moscow we saw Brezhnev and Kosygin, which normally is a thing reserved for heads of state. I mean, and whatever process they went through, the Soviet government was clearly working on the assumption that this man was very likely to be president of the United States, and that their two top leaders had to have a look at him.

And it was, you know, it was amazing to be in Moscow. It was, you know, 19-, well it was 1971, it was the, the Cold War was still on. It was very interesting. We stayed in the Hotel Russia, a big giant hotel. And it was the dead of winter, it was bitterly cold. And, you know, we were shepherding these cars from one meeting to the next. I think we were, Muskie was there for three or four hours. That trip wasn't, London, it was England, Germany and the Soviet Union as I recall. Now, there was a trip to Israel; I don't know if it was the same swing or not.

AL: According to the research I did, it was on the same -

PK: Was Israel the same? We went to Israel the same trip?

AL: According to what I could find, yeah.

PK: What countries did you find?

AL: I found London, Israel, Egypt, Moscow and Bonn.

PK: Exactly right, that's exactly right. I did not go to London. They went to London, Bonn got canceled. I wish I could remember the exact order of these things, but I also went to Israel and Egypt.

AL: We're not, you don't worry about the exact order, but what was the feeling, especially with -?

PK: The feeling was he was going to be president of the United States. And he was meeting with the world leaders and getting to know them so that he could, and there were several national correspondents coming and going. And wherever we went there were a couple of the local correspondents for the *New York Times* and, you know. I mean, it was in a different, it was, there was important national press attention focused on this. And there were stories in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* and *Time* and *Newsweek* about this trip.

And, you know, in Israel we went up on the Golan Heights. It was 1970, you know, those two years, 1971, it was still dangerous. We took a trip up to the Golan Heights, I remember that very, very clearly. And then, and at that time you could not fly directly from Israel to Egypt. You had to go somewhere else and change planes and airlines. I think we went to Rhodes, we flew across, part way across the Mediterranean. I'm sorry, we went to, not Rhodes, it'll come back to me in a minute. We had to fly somewhere and change planes and airlines and then fly back in.

And then we went to Egypt and met everybody there and toured all around. I went to the pyramids with Jane Muskie and Bob Nelson, went in to the Great Pyramid. And the whole, I mean, it wasn't a huge party, it was about ten people. Don and Hilda were there, Jane, the senator, myself, Bob Nelson was on part of the trip as an advance person. Tony Lake was really along as foreign policy adviser. I'm trying to remember if Averell Harriman met us in Moscow, I think he did, I think Averell Harriman met us in Moscow. I don't remember if anybody else met us. But the overall feeling of the thing was very serious. And, you know, Muskie was acting like, and being treated like ‘a head of state in waiting’, is the way I put it; a shadow government.

AL: Were reactions in those countries he visited positive after, did you get a sense of that afterwards?

PK: Yes, I would, yeah, you did and you didn't because it was all, we didn't do public events.

It was all, I mean we didn't, we weren't going around hand shaking. We were sitting in hotels and meeting with the leaders and getting briefed and rebriefed. So you didn't have, but I mean in Moscow the amazing thing was not what Kosygin and Brezhnev said, but that you got to see them. And he did meet with the heads of state everywhere, everywhere. There was no, and it was, you know, he was being treated like much more than a regular U.S. senator. It was part of the whole, the theory of it, which I think was in part unintentional and forced on by circumstances, was, you know, if you act like a president long enough maybe you'll be president. That was the good and the bad, all in one.

AL: So, would you say there was a lot of overconfidence going into the '72 campaign?

PK: Well yeah, and it was hard not to, not to have it. I think we all, you know, from the time of his 1968 performance, I think we all, the reaction of the country was so positive, it was hard not to be over confident, you know. It was huge mistake because we didn't think about exactly what you really have to do to get the Democratic nomination. And in many respects Muskie would have been a wonderful president, but he was a lousy candidate. You know, he didn't want to do the, nor was he particularly good at, the, you know, sitting around with the three thousandth voter in New Hampshire. It was not his style. He was better on television, better at public speaking than he was sitting here, you know, why don't we come over to your house and persuade you to cast your single vote for me. He just wouldn't. So yeah, I think we were overconfident.

AL: What was George Mitchell's role in that campaign? Did he, did he have a prominent role during that year?

PK: Oh yes, yeah, George had a huge role. George really, I'm trying to remember when George moved back down to Washington and, you know, basically took over day-to-day operation of the campaign. And, yeah, George had a huge role.

AL: And Don?

PK: And Don ran the senate office. And of course there were, and then Berl Bernhard had a big role and, you know I, it is a little of a blur to me now. I think if I were sitting and maybe we, if I sat here with Eliot Cutler for three hours, we could, I could piece together dates and things because we would remind each other of things. But, you know, there were confusion and territorial disputes from the beginning; lack of clarity of lines of authority and responsibility.

AL: Between Berl and Don and -

PK: Don, Berl and George. All of whom had separate relationships with the senator. And that would have all been fine if we had coasted to success, but we didn't and so it was, it was very hard. By the time people figured out what the problems were, it was too late to make the changes that needed to be made. And the candidate wasn't built for them.

AL: A little bit more about, well, let's skip a little bit and, on the campaign trail in '71 and '72 you were termed the briefcase man? What, first of all what is that?

PK: Well, I was the person who carried his briefcase, and basically was his kind of personal staff person, you know. I got him into his hotel room, put him to bed at night, woke him up the morning, had breakfast with him, said, "Here's your schedule. Here's what you're doing today." You know, handled communications between the advance staff and handled, we landed a stop, sat down with the advance person and him, and went over the schedule. And basically functioned as his sort of personal information officer, is what you would call it then.

AL: So you would sort of brief him.

PK: I would, yes. I would answer, "yes," I would handle his communications needs, in and out.

AL: So there were a lot of people communicating with you, so that -

PK: Lots and lots. And when you'd arrive at a stop, you know, Muskie was a formidable figure. And people, we had advance staff, you know, competent young people going out ahead, arranging all these events. And, you know, you'd land and, the plane would land, or whatever. And they would come on board and everybody would suddenly get nervous and tongue-tied. And we'd say, "Now tell the senator where are we going, what are we doing. Is there any new change in this event? Is there anything we need to know about this event? Who are the congressmen who are here? Who are the . . . . ?" You know, let's go over it, let's, and keep everybody in the right mood. You know, if the speech wasn't done. I had the responsibility for feeding to him, as it was necessary at the right moment, the information and material that he needed to see everywhere, hour by hour; sometimes minute by minute. It was fun. It was a wonderful, wonderful education. And then I went on later to do that same job, actually an expanded version of that job, for Mondale.

AL: What was it like between, the differences between Muskie and Mondale? Did you, did it seem like two completely different -?

PK: Utterly, night and day. Yeah, utterly night and day.

AL: Their styles were different?

PK: Very, very different. Mondale was very much more political and very much more willing to be political in a day-to-day way. I'm very fond of Mondale, too. I consider him a very dear friend and a great mentor and great, he gave me a wonderful opportunity to work for him and I really enjoyed it. And I've unusually, consider myself to have had the opportunity to get to know these two guys very, very well and to have learned a great deal from them both, and that's unusual. I had the background to have that relationship with Muskie by virtue of my family background and the relationship I had with him since I was a little kid. To have ended up being that intimate with Mondale, I think, was an unusual thing. And I had the same job with Mondale and we developed a relationship that permitted me to have that relationship with him, which was unusual. Yeah, they were just radically different personalities.

You know, Senator Muskie was a complicated critter. He was a conflicted person. He was, you know, full of very large ideas, and full of extremely high purpose. He was a person of very, very high and serious purpose, who had a hard time dealing with the lesser things. And I don't mean that as an excuse, I mean that sounds, that, and that was a problem, because life is not just made up of high purposes. I really do think he would have been potentially a spectacular president, somebody who would have changed the direction of the country and had a profound impact on, you know, people's views of things. He was a man you could really look up to in a slightly Olympian way. But, a significant reason why he didn't get there is that he didn't have the other side of the equation. And, you know, so you don't always have both sides of the equation. Nobody does.

AL: Let me stop right here and flip the tape.

End of Side A
Side B

AL: We are now on Side B of the interview with Mr. Peter Kyros [Jr.]. And we were talking, well I guess the question I wanted to ask was a general one of your recollections. Were there things that really stuck out in your mind during that campaign? Something poignant or humorous, or -?

PK: You know, I'm going to really have to think about that. I have blocked some of it out. I, it was a very intense experience and it was very personal for me. Very intensely personal because I really, like everyone else involved in the campaign, I thought we were going to win. Unlike many of the other more experienced and more seasoned people, the possibility that we weren't going to win was not in my mind. I was really a kid. I had worked a little bit in the '68 campaign, fair amount, but I had been, you know, literally carrying baggage and doing the baggage hauling in the '68 campaign. I mean I really didn't, it was a real intern type job.

I had some contact with the senator but, and so I was stunned as January and February and March of 1972 wore on. And, you know, I watched Muskie become really grimmer and grimmer and grimmer. It was a, it was a, I think he was very, very deeply embittered by his inability to connect with people, to connect with the voters. You know, I mean, you ask a hundred so-called political people nowadays, who won the 1972 New Hampshire primary and most of them will say McGovern. And of course that's not true, we won the primary. But we had, we were in this, you know, expectations maelstrom.

You know, I mean I was standing there when he was standing on the thing, when he allegedly cried. He was certainly choked up; he didn't cry. He was, had snow melting on his face. The idea that he had tears streaming down his face was a joke, it was a complete falsehood. But he was choked up. He was upset, absolutely. Now, today of course it would be seen as making him a real person. And then it was a different world.

And I remember as I, you know, leap forward to the end, I remember Florida. That was shocking when we lost Florida. Shocking to me. And then I very clearly remember losing, the Pennsylvania primary must have been April 15th or something, and I remember losing the

Pennsylvania primary. And I remember the next day being in the headquarters at 1972 K Street and being in an elevator with George Mitchell and Harold Pachios going upstairs, and being silent for a minute and then saying, I remember saying, "What are we going to do?" And George Mitchell said, "Harold and I are going back to Maine, and you are going to law school." And that's what happened.

I went down to, it was already April, I had been planning to work in the White House. [*Laughter*] And I went down to University of Virginia. George made a phone call to somebody that he knew, whom I knew, too, and I went down to the University of Virginia Law School. They had already issued all their acceptances, it was again a different world, and I filled out the application form sitting in the office of the dean of admissions. And, I had taken the LSAT the year I graduated from, you know, two years before. And two weeks later I was accepted to UVA Law School.

We were all cut back from, on April 15th, to like ten dollars a day. I mean, it was over. It was over. It happened very fast. It's a blur to me. I remember, I remember New Hampshire. And I remember the feeling of being stunned, just stunned by this thing that happened. And Florida was just horrible, I mean horrible, horrible, horrible, no fun at all. The joy and the, it was a meltdown because as soon as it was clear that we were vulnerable, everybody dug at the vulnerability and there was never a chance to come back. It was too late. And the system, the campaign that we had created, as well as the calendar that was in place then, was just impossible. Once it was clear that we were vulnerable and that this McGovern thing was going on, that was the end of it, that was the end of it.

I remember Muskie as being, actually increasingly withdrawn. And not in any sense unable to cope, but very fatalistic. I do not remember him coming out, going, drawing into his shell a little bit, not coming out to everybody and saying, "Buck up, let's fight." I don't remember any of that at all. I think he knew that it was fatal, a fatal blow. And that was that. He went through the motions for a brief while. And then by the time we got to Maine it was, you know, between, it was fifty or sixty days between New Hampshire and, I think we suspended our campaign a day or two after Pennsylvania. And said, basically, we're going to take our delegates. We're going to suspend campaigning but we'll take the delegates that we have when we get, you know, to the convention.

AL: You mentioned the more seasoned workers on the campaign maybe weren't as stunned.

PK: Yes.

AL: Weren't quite as surprised as you and -

PK: Yeah, I think the main people around Muskie were just blown away. But you know, we had acquired, everybody working in politics was working for Muskie. Mark Shields, Jim Johnson, everybody who later went on to have other careers, everybody, I mean we just hired everybody in sight. It was this huge headquarters operation, huge. Everybody, every, you know, we had hundreds of office holders, hundreds of, literally hundreds of senators and mayors and congressmen and state legislators had endorsed Muskie, publicly. And we all, to some extent we

all really believed in that, that that was, you know.

Muskie always had a, put a very high value on the advice and the opinion, the political opinion of other elected people. Yeah, I think he always thought, 'Well they went through it, they had had the experience of being elected. They are more knowledgeable about, the congressman from XYZ town is going to be more knowledgeable about what his electorate really thinks and how they'll act, than any five staff guys. Mine or his or somebody else's, or some reporter'. So that was all very, very persuasive to Muskie, you know.

And at the end of 1971 and at the very beginning of 1972 we were flying around the country collecting these endorsements. You know, we'd go to Ohio and get Jack Gilligan's endorsement. We'd go to California and get Jess Unruh's[1] endorsement. We'd go here, we'd go there.

AL: Do you -?

PK: And sometimes we'd fly in and we'd do this kind of political elite endorsement event, and we wouldn't even do another public event. And, you know, unbeknownst to us, the McGovern people were out organizing, figuring out how to win the caucuses, how, you know, how to get a delegate here and a delegate there. And they had created in New Hampshire, an army of people passionately committed to their cause. And we had, you know, all of the state legislators and all the political elites, all of whom thought we were going to win in a kind of mutually reinforcing set of beliefs. None of whom lifted a finger to do anything. It was amazing. And I do think Muskie from the very, from the night of the New Hampshire primary, I think he was, I think a couple of things. Is this useful?

AL: Yes.

PK: I think a couple of things. I think he was stunned by the outcome. And I think he was even more stunned by the perception of the outcome. And he used to say, we all used to say, "Well Jesus Christ, we won the primary." You know? And that wasn't enough. And suddenly the bar was higher and it was confusing and it was impossible to figure out what standard [was being used]. I mean, he was just stunned by that. And I think that caused him a loss of confidence in his organization. But perhaps much more than that, because there were ways in which, although for all of his enormous talents bordering on genius in some areas, he was a very insecure man. And I think that caused him a huge amount of self doubt; it caused him a huge amount of self doubt. And he did become fatalistic and withdrawn after that a little bit. Which I'm not sure changed the outcome, because I'm not sure the outcome was going to be changeable by then.

And then, you know, you just see the looks on the faces of George and Harold and Berl and Don and we immediately went into . . . . And we had this enormous operation in Washington, just enormous, you know, policy wonks and law clerks and, you know, people, I mean just

[1] Jesse Marvin ABig Daddy@ Unruh (1922-1987), democrat from California ran for many offices including Governor and Mayor of Los Angeles, California. State treasurer 1975-87.

unbelievable. Up to that time I think certainly the biggest headquarters operation. I mean, regional directors and, everybody, you, everybody was either hired or endorsed Muskie and, you know, got a plane ride. And it, it was amazing how it unwound.

AL: Did you ever get a sense of, or did you ever have a conversation with Don Nicoll at that time or shortly thereafter of his feelings about -?

PK: No. No I didn't. We were all, I actually think a bunch of us, we had like a group depression. We were just stunned. And, you know, immediately all the advance people disappeared, the traveling stopped, the money dried up. And you had to kind of pick up your, everybody was concerned about survival. And I do think that a lot of the young people in the campaign, and there were many, were angry at the leadership of the campaign.

AL: Because they felt there wasn't the right -?

PK: Didn't have any bloody idea what they were doing, they weren't prepared for this demand, the strategy was fundamentally flawed, fundamentally flawed. And peo-, I think people were angry. I mean, you go back and ask a dozen of the advance people, the young kids.

There were a lot of people working in the lost campaign. Muskie, it's a forgotten thing, Muskie I think is viewed historically now as, you know, the candidate of the establishment, and McGovern historically as the candidate of youth and change. And, you know, the anti-war movement and so forth. And I don't think that's entirely correct. There were many, many idealistic young people working in the Muskie campaign because we were running against Nixon. You know, it was Nixon that we were, I mean that was, there was an enemy.

And I think those people, you know, one of my great friends in the campaign was a fellow called Tim Smith, who actually turned out, we roomed together in law school. And Tim came to the Muskie campaign as a, you know, a youthful volunteer when he was out of, between college and law school and he took a year off, as did a lot of people. There were many, many advance people and staff people and headquarters people and people in the field in their twenties. And I think they were shocked and angry. And, you know, the senator did not provide them any emotional, I don't know what the word is. When it collapsed, it just collapsed. It just, it was like a house that was burning from the inside, a building, and it just collapsed like that. It fell in upon itself.

And it's probably unfair to have expected the leadership of the campaign, certainly to solve the problem and fix the strategy, because it was too late for that. That was clear. But even to have, I think, I think, you know, I'd be interested in, I'm sure that Don and George Mitchell were all equally stunned. And, you know, trying hard to save things but there was nothing to save. And then it was like a switch, you know, it just turned off. And there was a very minimal operation, you know, we gave the plane back and we, there was a very minimal operation between probably April 15th and the convention. But, you know, by June 1st I don't think there were many people around who thought Muskie was going to be the nominee. You know, the story had moved. And this huge panoply of expectations had been blown up. And I don't think Muskie ever recovered from that.

AL: Did Don Nicoll leave then, or was that a while later?

PK: It was a while later, I think. I think Don Nicoll stayed a good long while after that. But, you know, at the end of that cycle, whatever, or, I don't know when that cycle ended. I went off to law school. And certainly by, my guess is by the beginning of '73, I think Don came back here. Certainly George did. And I can't remember who took over from Don right then, was it Maynard Toll or was it, did Leon come over, Leon came over later.

AL: Leon was later.

PK: It was Maynard, wasn't it?

AL: It may have been. I can't remember at the moment, for sure.

PK: It was, yeah, yeah, I'm trying to remember too, he came over to, but Leon was still, was a IGR still, yeah. No, Leon was at Air and Water and Al From was at IGR. Yes. You know, I think Don internally, by people who were working in the campaign, was seen as a big problem. But that of course was, I don't know whether that was fair or right or not, he was there. He was viewed as the person closest to Muskie. And he was also viewed as, he and George and Berl were viewed as the troika of people intimate with Muskie who had the responsibility for the macro strategic decisions. And yeah, I think they all were viewed as . . . .

But you know, ultimately I think Mark Shields wrote a column which was right and which was a, I think became the official perception. And that was, you know, you can say all you want to about staff people and strategies. A campaign really reflects ultimately, it's I think true and one of the most interesting things about large scale national politics, that a huge presidential campaign that involves thousands and thousands of people and millions of dollars does in fact ultimately reflect the personality, the mode of thought, the personality structures of, the candidate, and this one did reflect Muskie's, his strengths and his weaknesses. And so whose responsibility is that? And it's a very complicated human endeavor. So I think actually Don probably took an unfair rap. You know, Muskie was unclear about who he wanted to have running the campaign. Then in '7-, should I keep going?

AL: Yeah, go ahead.

PK: And then, you know, I went to law school. You know, I came back, I graduated from law school in '75. And I had, really, two offers: one was to go to New York and practice law in a big firm, and the other was to come back and work for Muskie. And I took the latter, and I'm really glad I did. It was a, the Senate Budget Committee had just been formed and I had a chance to be deputy council to John McEvoy in the Senate Budget Committee. And it led to, the next two or three years of my life were really great, because that ultimately is what led to my getting to know Mondale. But I came back and I went to work in the senate, which was great, I'd never done that really for Muskie before, and I loved it. I really had fun. It was great to be at the senate budget committee. I changed my relationship with Muskie from being an administrative staff person to being a substantive staff person, which was really fun. And -

AL: Meaning that you had more intellectual discussions.

PK: Much, yeah. And, you know, it was relating to him about legislation. And then probably in '7-, late, early '7-, late '75, early '76 Muskie, they asked me to, I left the budget committee, and I went over to the senate office. And I sat . . . . Muskie had so much responsibility in the senate, so many committee and subcommittee responsibilities and so much going on. They made me counsel to the senator, that was my title. And I sat over in the senate office and I coordinated the flow, all the substantive flow to him for the better part of a year, and really enjoyed that.

I used to sit, Muskie sat in the back row of the senate, and I used to, had, it was a great, it was fun and a great privilege, I really enjoyed it and learned so much from it. You know, you can only have one, a senator can only have one, sometimes at most two staff people on the floor at any time. And I used to sit on the sofa in the corner of the senate chamber behind Muskie and staff him on the senate floor, hours at a time. It was, you know, a young lawyer's, political lawyer's dream job. It was really, really, really fun.

AL: It must have been.

PK: Fabulous.

AL: To see how the senate works and observe these people.

PK: Truly, truly fabulous, yeah. And then, you know, then the Carter thing started to happen and it was, I think he was terribly torn. I think he wanted to be vice president and didn't want to be vice president. And I don't think he, I know why they didn't choose him. They did not choose him because they did not think he would relish an aggressive campaign. They wanted somebody who was going to go to every cruddy little town and city. They didn't not choose him because of personality things, or intellectual things, or. I think they loved the idea of Carter-Muskie, because Carter was a nobody and Muskie was a big somebody. And I actually think the two of them, and in the interview process that was all fine.

But I think they picked Mon-, I know why they picked Mondale, because I talked to the people about it, because I went to work for Mondale, got to know the party people very well. They picked Mondale because they, correctly, saw that Mondale would go to East Meddybemps and talk to three voters, willingly and happily, if it was his assignment. And they didn't see Muskie doing it, and they were right. They were right. So they picked Mondale. And soon after the convention, you know, a lot of the Mondale people had been Muskie people, particularly Jim Johnson, who was essentially the chief operating officer of Mondale's operation. And I had gotten to know Jim in our campaign, in the Muskie campaign. And there weren't very many people who had the experience of flying around carrying somebody's briefcase, and knowing how to make that work. I actually, I mean there you know, not many people who did that, three or four people in the country knew how to do that for a Democratic presidential candidate. And so they called me very soon after the convention in '76 and said, you know, "Would you come to work in the campaign?" And I, you know, I was very torn, very, very, very torn. And I did it. And, um . . . .

AL: Did you enjoy the traveling, was that part of the allure for you?

PK: No, I really wanted to work in the White House, and had for a long time. And I think Muskie was disappointed and hurt. And I went down to his, I went to his senate office (to you know, SP-, I don't know what he had then, SP4 I guess, he had that little hideaway in the senate), to tell him that I had received this offer and that I had decided to take it. I will, I'll never forget, when I left that room I felt that he was hurt.

AL: Did he say anything to you?

PK: He said, "I guess you haven't had enough to keep you going here." You haven't had . . . . It was a very upsetting interview. He was, I thought he was quite pissy, actually, if you'll pardon the expression. I was disappointed in the way he handled it, and it also brought home to me that he was disappointed. And the interesting part of it is, I was shocked by it, because he never told you that he wanted you around. And then he was aggravated when you left.

He never gave positive feedback. He would never say to you, "You did a great job," or "that was terrific," or, you know. He only ever gave negative feedback. And people stayed with him because they, I mean it was hard, you know, because they recognized his greatness and his commitment to quality, and that he treated himself that way, that he was very brutal with himself, I think. But he would never say to some staff guy, "Great work on this bill", you know, "congratulations, let's do another one." Or let's, you know, you done a, you've really helped on this. Never. So then when you went in to say, you know, "I'm going to go do something else." He clearly was upset, aggravated and nonplused and disappointed. And, you know, "Why are you leaving me? Why are you being disloyal to me at some level?" And that was the, that was like the first positive feedback you'd get. That wasn't very good.

Years later when I left Mondale, I'll never forget this, this is, these were signal events in my life. Mondale said to me, "I hate to see you go. I'm really going to miss you, but I will view you for the rest of my life as part of my team." He had a totally different way of . . . .

AL: He understood you needed to go on.

PK: Well, he also understood how to keep people in a relationship that, you know, which Muskie really didn't. Muskie just expected that you were just going to stay there, you know, and like some Pharaonic servant be buried in the temple with him at the end. And that wasn't, that was, that's, that was his weakness.

AL: Yeah, non-motivational.

PK: Yeah, you were motiv-, you were supposed to be motivated by the cause and by his extraordinary commitment to high standards, extraordinary, like nobody else, you know. But then, when you produced that commitment, and he lost a lot of good people by this, there's a limited number of people who can stand that equation. And, and you, I'm sure if you're doing the interviews you'll find that they all share a certain quality of black humor about Muskie. I

remember at Muskie's, what was the big birthday party now, was, it was his eightieth birthday.

AL: Eightieth, yeah.

PK: My wife, I had just married, when was that, 1994-ish. I had just married. And my wife does not come from a background of any of this politics. And we went together to that event at the, some big hotel in Washington, big enough. And there were a series of video tape things and speeches. And when we drove away, my wife turned to me and said, "Do you realize how many people told stories about how angry Muskie was all the time. Do you realize that? And you were all laughing about it." And, "What was that like?" And it was, it was absolutely right, it was, it had become a thing.

And we all, the people who stayed and loved him, of which there were many, accepted this aspect of his personality which fundamentally was that a lot of the time he was very unpleasant to work for. And you had to develop a belief that, which was accurate, that he was committed to a level of standards and issues that was amazing in American politics. And you also had to develop a thick skin and camaraderie and some black humor. And I wonder, I was just taken aback by my wife noticing. I mean, I didn't notice it because I've been part of it for thirty years, all my adult life, twenty years, whatever it was then. But that's what everybody was talking about, how they used to get chewed. And Muskie was there laughing about it and everything.

But you know what? It was odd; it's odd. Do you know what I mean? It's an odd . . . . I'm sure you have hundreds of hours of people saying, ". . . . and then he chewed me out about this, and then he swore at me about the faceless bastards, and then he . . . . ," you know. And the stories are, that's what people tell stories about Muskie about. And that's, that says it all, that says all the good and all the bad. There has to be a reason why people put up with that, and the reason is he was an extraordinary figure. And he was committed to substantive things and to standards that no one else in our current political life or in his time were committed to, including bloody George McGovern, with all due respect. But the downside of it is, the process of forming relationships with him was very, very difficult and for many people impossible.

We've covered a lot of it. That's my speech about him generally.

(*Pause in taping.*)

PK: You know, and I'd be interested, I'm sure this will all, when are you, you're going to publish this years from now, right? This is liable to be published. Are people, what are these materials for?

AL: Let me . . . .

PK: Yeah.

AL: This is now the end of the interview which is the third session with Mr. Peter N. Kyros, Jr.

End of Interview